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December 13, 1978

Dear Mr. Broyhill:

Thank you for your letter of November 30 in which you requested information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life.

The Honorable
James T. Broyhill,
House of Representatives.

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As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle; and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time, but in no way is to be considered a precedent.

The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially lower than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U. S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell in our Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, whose telephone number is 632-8562.

Sincerely,

DB/GJ

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary for
Congressional Relations

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November 30, 1978

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Douglas Bennet
Assistant Secretary for
Congressional Relations
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W., Rm. 7261
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Bennet:

In recent days, I have received numerous inquiries from constituents with regard to the Peoples Temple murders and mass suicides in Jonestown, Guyana. Accordingly, I have several questions which I would appreciate your addressing in order that I may have more factual information on this matter. The questions are as follows:

1. What authority does the Federal government have to carry-out the recovery of the Temple members and, specifically, how does this apply to the expenditure of Federal funds?

2. In light of the recovery efforts in Jonestown, what will be the U.S. policy in the future with regard to the return of Americans, in similar situations?

3. What does the Federal government intend to do in order to help defray the costs of the recovery? Will an effort be made to put a lien on the assets of the Peoples Temple in an effort to pay for the recovery costs?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

With best regards,

James T. Broyhill
Member of Congress

JTB/rf

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